

Mark 6:1-13 (NRSV)

¹ He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ² On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

⁴ Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." ⁵ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their unbelief.

A prophet without honour.

In today's Gospel, Mark presents us the Prophet without honour, let's try to unpack a little bit.

From the previous verses, we are told that Jesus healed a woman with the flow of blood and Jairus' daughter. Because of their faith, their trust, loyalty, bonding with God in spite of their hopeless circumstances, these members of the Judean had received healing and new life. Yes Jesus gives life to those willing.

Jesus then leaves that place and then moved to his home town. Nazareth as you know was a small town with a very small population. Jesus would have been well known there because his parents lived there after his birth.

Jesus had been home for a few days as was the family, they attended synagogue on the Sabbath. He was allowed to speak. He would only have had a few minutes to speak, may be 10 minutes or less. We don't know. Jewish worship would not focus more on sermon but Scripture reading.

So, he began to teach, People then were amazed at His teaching. The teaching appeared to have genuine insight. A teaching which would have been clear and straight forward. He taught with authority, the words were authoritative. Despite to the fact to other people, it was offensive. As Paul could say,

The teaching about the cross seems foolish to those who are lost. But to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

What kind of teaching or preaching was this, that Jesus taught?

In the words of Donald G. Miller (17-18), he says,

“The gospel is an act of God, its preaching and teaching must therefore be an act, a function of the great act, for a true sermon is a true deed.”

He further says,

“To preach or teach the gospel, then is not merely to say words but to effect a deed. To preach or teach is not merely to stand in a pulpit and speak, no matter how eloquently and effectively, nor even to set forth a theology. To preach or teach the gospel is to become part of the dynamic event wherein the living, redeeming God produces his act of redemption in a living encounter with men through the preacher. True preaching and teaching is an extension of the incarnation into the contemporary moment, the transfiguration of the cross and the resurrection from ancient facts of a remote past into living realities of the present.

Yes, Alma friends and partners you seem to have grasped well this kind of teaching and preaching, for you have become part of the dynamic event wherein the living, redeeming God in you, produces his act of redemption in a living encounter with people on the other side of the road. When you supported the vulnerable, when you shared the little with those communities in Messumba who were affected with floods, when you supported the construction of the church in Mongue, when you supported the church in Mandimba, Chigoma, St Paul, Yohanna Abudala, the Cathedral in Messumba and the Diocese at Large.

A sermon or a teaching Jesus taught in the synagogue was a kind of an act wherein the future crucified, risen Lord personally confronts men and women either to save or to judge them. It is this confrontation that we are told in verse 3 of Mark Chapter 6 that **“the people took offense at him”**. The same Gospel that brings life at times can appear to be offensive to other

Ruskins somewhere said,

“A sermon is thirty minutes to raise the dead”, but in fact, preachers and teachers cannot raise the dead but the living Christ.

Donald G. Miller further says that, in real teaching of the gospel Christ is the **P**reacher and teacher. Christ the **P**reacher speaks through the **p**reacher. Eloquence, logical arrangement, sustained progression, handsome appearance, intellectual brilliance, profundity of thought, the ability to

sway audience by the subtle arts of speech-these are but accidents, not the essence. One would have all these but yet not preach or teach.

So how do we teach in this manner? In the environment where the church is growing so fast, a parish with more than 50 outstations, parishes like Morrupula and Mecanhelas, being supervised by one Priest, congregations that are led by lay people, who have very little knowledge of the Bible? Is really a challenge to a young Bishop like me.

Jesus teaching was authentic. An authentic word from God through a poor human agent is true preaching and teaching. Whereas a teaching and preaching that does no more than communicate human ideas is not true preaching at all.

To introduce men to God so that He (God) and they (the church) have dealings with each other is an event of abiding eternal value. On the other hand, merely to talk about God without his being present is Spiritually worthless, no matter how eloquent or enjoyable the speech is. No man has really preached or taught until the two-sided encounter between him or her and his or her congregation has given way to three-sided encounter, where God Himself becomes one of the living parties to it.

So this, I think is a chief challenge to the fast growing Dioceses, teaching and training leaders so that they can be in a position to share and defend the faith to others.

Ideal preaching and teaching would go even one step further, where the presence of God becomes so real that the preacher himself or herself drops almost entirely out of the consciousness of the worshippers, so that even as the preachers speaks, they and God seem to be left alone.”

So, coming back to the text those who really listened and were open to Jesus words, were the ones who were really amazed. They had clearly heard about his teaching.

So what kind of teaching was this that made people amazed? How do we get there as a church, is an issue?

You will also agree with me that we are living in a world that is becoming and more secularized, characterized by unbelief. It feels as if we are living in a Nazareth-world, a culture that is, at best, disinterested in Jesus. And so we need trained spiritual leaders who can be courageous enough to communicate the faith with integrity.

We do have one thing in a secularized world where we find ourselves hooked in and it makes all the difference. We have experienced the faithfulness of God in Jesus crucified and risen. So, we may marvel at the unbelief around us, but still we should hold to that faith even when in every reason, it doesn't seem to hold that faith. We need to continue going forth, to our context and beyond proclaiming and practicing our faith in Christ.
Amen